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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
LIBRARY EXTENSION PUBLICATION

VOL. XXIII

OCTOBER 1957

No. 1

THE THEATRE TODAY
1954 - 1957

By
RAY CARPENTER



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*Published four times a year, October, January, April and July
by the University of North Carolina Library. Entered as
second-class matter February 5, 1926, under
the act of August 24, 1912.
Chapel Hill, N. C.*

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Foreword

The actual richness of the theatre in the past few years can barely be glimpsed in the necessarily limited scope of this study. Apart from the section devoted to the Kabuki drama we have attended only to the conventional two or three-act play produced in New York in the 1954-1957 seasons. It is important to remember that this is only one segment of the theatre, excluding such forms as the dance, opera, musical comedy, and review.

In making selections for reading one must consider several things that may render some further appreciation of the plays themselves. The most significant difficulty lies in the difference between the play as it is read and as it is acted and seen on the stage. Some plays, of course, do not read at all well; the functions of the actors and the ideas may be paramount and the written script secondary. In fact, there are many non-literary elements in all plays, however important the dialogue has become in contemporary theatre. While reading plays, it is necessary to keep the non-literary elements in mind. The purely theatrical effects—lighting, scenery, the business of the actors as well as their individual mode of delivery and the director's emphases on this or that idea in the play—all must be accounted for in the reader's own mind. This is part of the great enjoyment in reading plays, for it allows the reader to project his ideas and moods in a very special way that the novel or other literary forms do not allow so freely. Furthermore, an excellent way of exploiting this enjoyment is to read the plays aloud, individually or in a group. Among the plays in this outline, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and *The Ponder Heart* are especially suited for reading aloud; the intensity and humour of both is greatly enhanced.

The values of the plays you will be reading are widely divergent, from both a literary and a theatrical point of view. Some of them will probably survive the fashions of the day to become standards by which we will measure future dramas. Others may pass quickly from our memories, delightful as they are today. An excellent subject for any reading program is to evaluate each play for its universality and its dramatic integrity.

PROGRAM I

VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET — THE LARK

VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET has enjoyed success on both stage and television. No little part of its acclaim is due to the magnificent acting of Cyril Ritchard, but Gore Vidal's story and his wit can easily carry the day for reading pleasure. We are introduced into a super-real world of "the day after tomorrow" which looks only too unhappily like today. Everyone is familiarly ambitious, short-sighted, and unimaginative like Daddy Spelding, the famous radio announcer, or serenely pleased with his station, like John. Ellen, the daughter and fiancée, rests somewhere in-between, wanting John as he is but needing Daddy's approval and pleasure, too. Catapulted from Outer Space into their lives is a wildly humorous man called Kreton. He seems absolutely invulnerable and omniscient—not the least of his embarrassing powers is mind-reading. He is immediately "attacked" by the Army, especially in the person of the extraordinarily single-minded General Powers, but all of Powers' stratagems are ineffective, and he ends up as Kreton's aide. Kreton has one real desire—to see the world at war. War is a game for him, and he thinks that all the world likes it, too. Why else should we make war so well and so frequently if we didn't enjoy it? Kreton acquires command of the world government and prepares for the biggest onslaught of all time. And only because he has the mind of a child is the "world" and the play saved.

The story of St. Joan of Arc is retold in Jean Anouilh's THE LARK with great clarity and detachment. It outlines objectively the forces of the church, throne, army and assorted politicians, but the play still yields the stark figure of a girl becoming a martyr. The setting is of a time like most times: an outraged world confused by national and personal pride. Such a world cannot entertain saintliness, for a saint rarely adopts the formal guises of piety that make a mockery of the truly devout. This version seems almost clinical at times in presenting the familiar happenings and characters. However, by making strong contrasts the style itself lends force to the story. The screen of the action catches the fierce emotions of pride and religious devotion clearly and boldly, perhaps more than a partisan approach might

do. Much credit must be given to Lillian Hellman for her translation of this play.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Visit to a Small Planet*, by Gore Vidal

Analyze some of the ideas in this play. Why do you suppose that some people objected to its teasing, its iconoclasm?

There are many ways that this kind of fantasy or "science fiction" can show up human weaknesses and strength by clever use of contrast. Discuss. Study the character of Kreton, particularly the meaning of his "childishness."

2. *The Lark*, by Jean Anouilh

Compare this version of the story of St. Joan with others you have read. Does this less romantic viewpoint add to the strength of the story? Discuss the elements that make for the martyrdom of Joan. Which of them are attributable to her and which to society?

Additional Reading:

Death of Billy the Kid; other television plays by Gore Vidal in this collection.

Antigone, by Jean Anouilh.

St. Joan, by George Bernard Shaw.

PROGRAM II

WAITING FOR GODOT — SEPARATE TABLES

WAITING FOR GODOT by Samuel Beckett is mainly about two tramp-like characters waiting for someone named Godot who never comes. The two loiterers are tramps of the kind that remind us of Charlie Chaplin's characterizations in the silent films. There is in all of us that element of waiting and searching for someone to show us a way or give us a reason. The many things that we do and say in a lifetime are full of the broadest comedy, and the "waiting" and the "comedy" are the two elements of this play. Samuel Beckett shows us that the very ability to live with a sense of the comic—wittingly or not—is all that gives us dignity and stability in what otherwise might be moments of complete despair. The two companions have long exchanges with a "lord of the earth" and his "slave" who is staggering and whimpering at the end of a rope. Quite simply, they at least suggest the two social levels of society: those who have material wealth and command and those who carry the burdens! Captured in the poetic dialogue is the quiet and steady pace of humanity, continuing without really knowing why it does, but delighting in momentary gambits with each other and in discovering the many things around them. Possibly Mr. Beckett sees that faith in God is almost gone but never completely given up. At least an illusion remains in waiting.

SEPARATE TABLES consists of two plays by Terence Rattigan, TABLE BY THE WINDOW and TABLE NUMBER SEVEN which were presented on the same bill and performed by the same cast. Both plays are set in a private hotel near Bournemouth on the English seaside, and the characters are all retired in a manner of speaking, either from age, incompetence, wealth, or temporarily for a vacation. The first story brings us an alcoholic former politician who is presently a journalist. Part of his problem was an unhappy marriage that pursues him as his former wife appears at the hotel as another guest. They meet and reminisce coolly, but underneath the casual, tightly-controlled conversation the tremendous tensions of their intimacy are bared. We have brief glimpses of their former brilliance, beauty, hate, love, and despair. Both realize that they destroy each other just as they need each other, but hope that the past years of separation have made them wiser and able to love without destruction.

TABLE NUMBER SEVEN brings us the same crowd at the hotel; their main occupation is gossip. In this instance they have a prime subject for ridicule, a very boring retired major. In transpires that he is an imposter, and that he has pled guilty to molesting women in a cinema. However, he has been briefly befriended by an under-assertive daughter of another resident, and this young lady now decides to champion him before the others. She is then able to become more a person herself and to help the major in his crisis with the overwhelming snobs in the hotel. The terrible loneliness of his life is brought into full relief with the full potential loneliness of the girl's life had she not finally asserted herself. By a gentle, intuitive compact they make their place and their peace with their fellows.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett

It has become a great game to analyze and identify all of the symbolism in this play. What are some of the interpretations? The relationships between master and man, bum and bum, can become quite clear on analysis. What do you think of the humour of Estragon? Bert Lahr was widely acclaimed as a great clown in this role.

Samuel Beckett was James Joyce's secretary for many years. Do you think Joyce has influenced Beckett's writing?

2. *Separate Tables*, by Terence Rattigan

Which of these two plays did you prefer?

How is the journalist made a sympathetic character? The major? The setting of the plays is important to the story. Discuss. Analyze the women characters, the ways that the various types carry across conflicting ideas and emotions. Give a synopsis of each play.

Additional Reading:

Threepenny Opera, by Bertolt Brecht.

No Exit, by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Deep Blue Sea, by Terence Rattigan.

PROGRAM III

WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION — THE PONDER HEART

To remark at any length about WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION would too readily give away elements of the splendid suspense in store for the reader. Agatha Christie understands stage action and pace remarkable well and has used her talents to their utmost in this drama. The plot concerns a man accused of murdering an elderly woman in order to inherit her money, and the solution of the murder largely takes place in the trial scenes. As the evidence accumulates in cross-examination the tension increases. An extraordinary witness for the prosecution gives some crucial information and an interview to the lawyers of the accused. The complications primarily involve one's sense of judgment of the various personnel involved, including the exotic and bold wife of the accused. The intensity of devotion to a loved one—and what may happen when it goes unrequited—provide the stuff that makes this play exciting to the last line.

The main character in THE PONDER HEART by Jerome Fields and Jerome Chodorov is Daniel Ponder, a rare but universal character, the kind that can't avoid crises but always bears them lightly and emerges victorious. Uncle Daniel is a well-to-do middle-aged man in a small Southern town on trial for the murder of his wife. For years his hilariously good humour has kept him in the general public affection, but even this carefree soul decided that he must have a wife. Without warning he appeared with a child bride, Bonnie Dee, and promptly set himself the task of fulfilling her every wish. By and large this activity consisted of buying electrical appliances, although at the moment they hadn't any electric power in their home! To cap this comic situation, the marriage was never really consummated. Bonnie Dee was too frightened of her husband; her one wifely response to him was to cut his hair—just as she used to do for her daddy. After ninety days they agreed to really act as man and wife, but Bonnie Dee fled to Memphis in terror. She returned to try another waiting period, but by this time there was a note of desperation in Uncle Daniel. One stormy night he came to their house to find his Bonnie Dee hidden under a sofa with the maid, Narciss—the noises of the storm were too much for them to bear. Uncle Daniel tried to comfort his wife, but she died suddenly in his arms. The doctor said that she simply died of a

heart attack. Uncle Daniel said that she died because her heart "busted with love" for which he was to blame! Without bothering to retire, the jury acquitted and cheered the comical Daniel Ponder.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Witness for the Prosecution*, by Agatha Christie

Discuss the final scene. Did it come as a surprise?

Consider the character of the wife. Why does one suspect her?

What characteristics does Miss Christie give to the accused to make him appear innocent or guilty?

Analyze the setting of the court scenes. What are the important elements here? Does such a setting build up suspense successfully?

2. *The Ponder Heart*, by Jerome Fields and Jerome Chodorov

Read several scenes of this play aloud.

How do you feel about Uncle Daniel as a man? Some might consider him a silly figure. How is this so?

What is he looking for in his "baby doll" wife? As a gentle, child-like person how does he compare with Kreton, a "naughty child," in *Visit to a Small Planet*?

Compare the court scenes with those in *Witness for the Prosecution*.

Additional Reading:

The Shrike, by Joseph Kramm.

Baby Doll, by Tennessee Williams.

PROGRAM IV

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK — THE ICEMAN COMETH

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, dramatized by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, tells us the story of a small group of Jews hiding from the Nazis in an Amsterdam loft. Anne Frank, a thoroughly vivacious adolescent, brings us close to their antics, fears, boredom, and dreams, and the quiet but fierce will to survive and the special tensions rising from the tightly closeted living make the story especially poignant. Anne is almost bird-like, darting from one person to another, observing and gleaning the most of all her relationships. She runs a gamut from comical brattishness to the horror of waiting for the time that must come, the arrival of the secret police. We see a small world in macrocosm hidden in this garret: the sturdy, warm, and courageous father, the troubled but understanding mother, the boorish and occasionally criminal adults living with the Franks. Anne's development focuses particularly in her friendship with Peter who is most nearly her own age. They share many decisions as well as attitudes about the adult world, much as children growing up together in freer conditions. The nightmare of waiting in hope and in fear is alternately dispelled and intensified as Anne earnestly engages with life as fully as she can.

Another version of the world caught up in a small group of people is in Eugene O'Neill's THE ICEMAN COMETH. All the chill of the city of New York in 1912 seems to have descended on the bar and hotel of Harry Hope. Hope is a drunken derelict whose sole accomplishment is to keep the place running for his alcoholic cronies. By careful and constant drinking the members of this private hell keep alive on pipe dreams. Some of the company is able to maintain delusions without alcohol, but each conceals his true identity, his guilt and fear. They all pretend that tomorrow will find them sober and back on the road to success. They look forward, however, to a special pleasure—a visit from Hickey, a big-spending salesman who delights them all with his good humour. When Hickey arrives this time he shocks them with his sobriety and his determination to help them free themselves from their predicament. This is no simple temperance tract, of course. Hickey is really trying to disabuse them of their self-delusions, their pipe dreams, their hopes for the eternal tomorrow. With painful intensity and cheerfulness he perseveres

to make them move from the bar and into the world to claim the fruit of their promises. All of his efforts nearly turn into disaster. Without hope or illusions these people are more desperate than ever, and when Hickey finally reveals that he has killed his wife, all his friends are happy to think that he is insane. They then can resume their peaceful drunkenness. Hickey is taken away by the police. He has come to a final stage of purging himself of "pipe dreams"; he had convinced himself that murdering his wife was a kindness to her. In a moment of insight, he realizes that he really hated her, and that the basis for his own self-cure was another violent pipe-dream.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett
Summarize the story of Anne's experiences in the hidden rooms.

Consider Mr. Frank. Is he a kind of stabilizing element in all their lives? Note the tensions built up from the long isolation in addition to the constant fear. Where else are there such "hidden rooms" where people are driven by racial persecution?

Why are the other characters important to the story?

Read as much as possible of the last act, giving a synopsis.

Discuss the reception that this play received when produced in Europe, especially in West Germany.

2. *The Iceman Cometh*, by Eugene O'Neill

How does this particular situation enable the author to write about a universal situation?

The bar in this story really indicates a place that is the "end of the line" for all concerned. Yet, it is a bar of "hope," to use O'Neill's magnificent pun. How do you suppose he intends this?

Analyze the highly developed character, Hickey.

This is by no means a problem play about alcoholism, but a statement about the condition of mankind in despair. Discuss.

Additional Reading:

Stalag 17, by Donald Bevan.

Member of the Wedding, by Carson McCullers.

The Hairy Ape; *Emperor Jones*, by Eugene O'Neill.

PROGRAM V

NO TIME FOR SERGEANTS — A HATFUL OF RAIN

The wit and wisdom of backwoods people have been praised, parodied, and reproduced in countless ways, but Ira Levin's **NO TIME FOR SERGEANTS** is one of the few occasions when this theme has been successfully dramatized. The story plays on the clash and confusion of two cultures, two ways of life—that of the Air Force and that of Will Stockdale, Georgia farmboy and Air Force recruit. Will is too naive to know that a sergeant is a recruit's natural enemy, and he nearly kills his own sergeant with kindness. Proceeding from one crisis to another, he constantly triumphs by simply failing to acknowledge that he is in trouble at all. He manages to confound psychiatry by his complete "normality," all the while engaging in un-military but very funny antics with non-coms, officers, and fellow recruits. Eventually he is assigned to the worst air crew on the base and is sent off on one of the most demented training missions imaginable. Doing everything wrong as usual, the pilot and navigator fly the plane off-course and over a bomb-testing area. Frantic warnings are not enough to get the hapless plane to safety. But such do not perish so easily; Will returns to get a medal through a fine comedy of errors. It all comes to a good end for the Air Force as Will is happily transferred to the Infantry—accompanied by his luckless sergeant.

A HATFUL OF RAIN, by Michael Gazzo, is essentially a problem play. Johnny Piper, a wounded war veteran, becomes addicted to drugs while undergoing hospital treatment in the service. He has rid himself of the habit once, but he is addicted again and tormented by his craving and by the brutality of the drug-peddlers. Johnny's wife thinks that he is involved with another woman by his neglecting her, and his brother, intending to be kind, has been giving him money for the drugs. The situation is complicated further by the fact that Johnny's wife and brother develop an embarrassingly strong affection for each other. All of Johnny's relationships with his father, his wife, and his brother are the key elements in the play and undergo a serious examination and re-working. The brother has to realize that he is literally killing Johnny with false kindness by giving him money. The morality of this and their whole unhappy life together as boys and as men becomes more sharply outlined as

the addiction gets worse. The peddlers threaten violence to get the money that Johnny owes them, and the tension of the story mounts in a weird and moving scene—the payment is made, but Johnny vows to quit the habit. In a moment of desperate courage, he and his wife together decide that he is to go to a hospital for treatment of his addiction.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *No Time for Sergeants*, by Ira Levin

What do you think is the funniest incident in the play?

One critic has remarked that Will Stockdale is little more than a comic-strip character with no real depth of personality. Do you agree? Compare this play with other stories you have read about military life such as *See Here*, *Private Hargrove*.

2. *A Hatful of Rain*, by Michael Gazzo

Consider the development of the wife, Celia, and her strength in this story.

How does Polo "use" Johnny's illness? Remember their troubles as children and Polo's inferiority when they grew up together.

What is the importance of the father in this time of Johnny's life?

Give a summary of the entire play, reading the last act particularly. Are the people plausible? Do you know of similar situations in literature or in your own experience that compare with this?

Additional Reading:

Come Back, Little Sheba, by William Inge.

Bells Are Ringing, by Betty Comden and Adolph Green.

PROGRAM VI

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT —

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

The discipline of construction in Eugene O'Neill's plays is most clearly evident in his LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT. It is essentially a study of his own family's relationships, including his talented but neurotically miserly father, his dope-addicted mother, an affectionate ne'er-do-well brother and O'Neill himself, afflicted with tuberculosis. A quicksand of love and hate holds the family in violent unresolved turmoil; their fears and sickness are frighteningly close to us. Yet, these particular family relationships remain integral and untouchable. Much of the action is taken up with illness. They must decide how to treat the younger brother for tuberculosis and how to deal with the mother's addiction. No one of them can share an opinion with another or really present a workable way to a cure. In trying to find solutions they pour out their anguish, searching some way to establish themselves with each other, to be understood, to be loved. They all seem fascinated with this family loyalty in spite of knowing that love is lost to them through their impotence, vanity, and self-reproach. The bluntness of the speech and its very repetitions heighten the family tensions to a grand scale of passions common to all the world.

A party for Big Daddy's sixty-fifth birthday sets the scene for Tennessee Williams' CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF as we are treated to a directly written story about a Mississippi delta family. The celebration is suffused with moods of guilt and anger from remembrance of things past and of greed for and fear of the future. Like O'Neill's personnel in THE ICEMAN COMETH, everyone is really trying to avoid the truth; they prefer the conventions of certain special lies in order to conceal their own ugliness and fear and to give comfort to each other. In trying to balance the reality with the covering-up myth each member of the family is about as unsteady as a cat on a hot tin roof. Their main problem is making some kind of peace with the world for the son. He is obsessed with the memories of an old college friend, and the family is afraid that the son was in love with him. Big Daddy, the mother, the young wife, and the young man himself—all exhort, demand, and plead, but no one seems able to really grasp the meaning of this love or any other kind. Everyone prefers to

play a role that would deny the feelings of intense comradely affection as well as the necessity for compassionate marital love.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, by Eugene O'Neill

Discuss the ways in which the father is shown as the central figure in all the family's destiny.

What raises this above a simple problem play?

Is it fair to say that the family's main trouble is the inability to understand or communicate with each other? Why might this be inadequate?

Read several scenes aloud to feel the tension and precision of the dialogue. Discuss this in relation to what you know about Eugene O'Neill's life.

2. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, by Tennessee Williams

Consider the many ideas expressed about family love, the expectations these people have of each other.

What is everyone afraid of? Are their feelings about love and sex so rigid that they are angry and afraid? How does this relate to the anxiety in *The Iceman Cometh*?

Contrast the family in this play and that in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Compare this play with others of Tennessee Williams, such as *The Rose Tattoo*, and *The Glass Menagerie*.

Additional Reading:

Tea and Sympathy, by Robert Anderson.

The Rose Tattoo, by Tennessee Williams.

A Touch of the Poet, by Eugene O'Neill.

PROGRAM VII

RED ROSES FOR ME — THE POTTING SHED

Of the three Irish playwrights in this outline, Sean O'Casey alone touches on the lives of the Irish people. His plays are always full of singing Irish speech and the struggle for human dignity. As in many O'Casey dramas, the people of RED ROSES FOR ME are caught up in the political turmoil of Ireland in the early Twentieth Century. Loyalties to family, friends, and church guide both the heroic and the mean in opposition and in love. Amayon, the freethinker and rebel, loves Sheila, a devout Roman Catholic who is unsympathetic with the rebel workers. She wants Amayon to be rid of his friends and his intellectual curiosity. Amayon can do neither, even at the risk of losing her for his wife. The strength and worth of Amayon's purposefulness is voiced in his powerful speeches and is seen in the reactions of his many friends. Although most of their action is off-stage, we see through them the meaning of the struggle for political and personal freedom for which Amayon becomes a necessary and incidental, if heroic, agent. He speaks eloquently about death: ". . . Who through every inch of life weaves a pattern of vigour and elation can never taste death, but goes to sleep among the stars, his withered arms outstretched to greet the echo of his own shout. . . . When a true man dies, he is buried in the birth of a thousand worlds."

Death in quite another setting with a far different face is prominent in THE POTTING SHED. Graham Greene's hero is the son of an atheist who is portrayed in a most unfavorable light as a person of low caste, low intelligence, and a less than loving personality. When his father dies, the son tries arduously to remember his troubled childhood. The loss of memory seems to center on the potting shed at his parents' home. Around this simple building Mr. Greene manages to create a great deal of suspense and low-key excitement. James, the hero, not only remembers nothing but also loves nothing. He is imbued with all the Nothingness that curses lonely, frightened people. Apparently this curse is caused by atheism and is curable by singularly devoted prayer. Prayer, in fact, turns out to be the source of both salvation and damnation for this family. Death is always near—either from the past or threateningly imminent. How prayer and death join in the potting shed in an amazing physical demon-

stration is the crux of James' life and that of his uncle, an alcoholic Roman Catholic priest. Mr. Greene takes James to the point of utmost despair (in spite of the ministrations of a psychiatrist) and brings him back with a miracle. In order to do this, he makes everything dependent on two forces in life, faith and materialism; any other possibilities are discounted. Religious faith, of course, is the stronger of the two forces, making the miracle possible.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Red Roses for Me*, by Sean O'Casey

Select scenes to read aloud, especially for the poetry.

Summarize the story. What is Amayon's goal for himself, for the world?

How do people react to men like Amayon?

Analyze the setting. Does it restrict the action too much?

Compare this play with others by O'Casey.

2. *The Potting Shed*, by Graham Greene

Discuss the author's message, the theme of the play.

Are the answers to some very important questions given too easily?

Mr. Greene has been criticized for using stereotyped characters. Consider this in the light of James and his father, especially. Are they too narrowly drawn?

Do you like this story as well as the novels by Graham Greene such as *Brighton Rock*?

Additional Reading:

Purple Dust; Juno and the Paycock, by Sean O'Casey.

The Cocktail Party; Family Reunion, by T. S. Eliot.

PROGRAM VIII

THE CHALK GARDEN — MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

THE CHALK GARDEN, by Enid Bagnold, far from being simply a comedy of manners, is nevertheless a highly mannered English comedy. Into an outrageously mismanaged household enters a governess, a mysterious and strong-willed woman. She finds that she must deal with a mischievous, adolescent girl filled with melodramatic tales, a dying butler, an eccentric manservant, and a giddy dowager as her employer. With a wonderful mixture of weirdness and aplomb she brings calm and order to the household, and in so doing this becomes its real authority. The governess and her past soon become the central point of interest for the family, and her story unfolds suspensefully. She elicits the truth from others in startling ways, cannily revealing aspects of the family members to each other that they had never before realized. Her special asset with people, as with the problem of growing plants in a garden of chalk, lies in this artful cultivation of the truth.

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT comes from the well-known television writer, Paddy Chayefsky, whose special talent is describing the familiar and homely problems of "normal" middle-class people. A widowed garment manufacturer in New York City falls in love with a much younger woman working in his office. She is on the verge of divorcing her husband as she feels that they have little more than a physical attachment for each other. Their relationship is further strained by his travelling far and wide as a musician. The middle-aged manufacturer is very concerned with himself; he feels that life is passing him by. Is he simply grasping at a straw in marrying a young woman? His family, especially a jealous sister, adds to his problems. All of the characters speak and assume positions in an ultra-common-place manner. The dialogue has a certain fascination in its stylized realism. However, the characters do become enough involved to bring some less-than-casual emotions to the surface. The final resolution comes from the girl: she realizes that she has had no hope or love with her "romantic" husband and that she really finds fulfillment of herself as a woman with the manufacturer.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *The Chalk Garden*, by Enid Bagnold

In what ways does the governess come to have such power over the family? Show how she provokes them into new ways of thinking.

Give a sketch of each character in the play. How do you account for the role of the butler who never appears?

How does the judge add to the suspense and to the character of the governess?

2. *Middle of the Night*, by Paddy Chayefsky

The ordinariness of the dialogue and the people is the keynote of this story. Discuss.

Is the romance of the manufacturer and his young secretary sensible?

Discuss the problems involved in both their lives.

Compare this with other Chayefsky stories such as the movie, *Marty*.

How are the relationships between men and women developed by this author? Do you think that they are realistic?

Additional Reading:

The Innocents, by William Archibald.

Turn of the Screw, a television version by Gore Vidal.

The Bachelor Party, by Paddy Chayefsky.

PROGRAM IX

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE — TIGER AT THE GATES

Arthur Miller's *A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE* has many of the qualities of a Greek tragedy. The story deals with a present-day Italian-American waterfront family in Brooklyn. At first we see Eddie, the head of the family, as an easy-going and very likable person. Two of his wife's cousins are presently smuggled into the country and come to live with them. One of these men, named Rodolpho, is magically handsome and poetically youthful, and he and Eddie's niece are soon in love. The development of the story from this point on is brutally incisive. Eddie is unwittingly so much in love with his niece that he will stop at nothing to get rid of Rodolpho. In his fury he even accuses the young man of homosexuality and embraces him to prove it. The power of his anger proves fatal, and the crushing final scene leaves no doubt as to the inevitable result of a man's betrayal of himself in the intense hatred of jealousy. A great deal of the story is told to us gradually and compassionately by a lawyer who acts as a kind of chorus that is with the audience during the entire play. This role adds another dimension in participating and interpreting, thus bringing the audience closer to the players.

Is Destiny like a ferocious tiger, always threatening to bring war? *TIGER AT THE GATES*, by Jean Giraudoux, examines this question wittily and philosophically. A classic array of characters is brought forth in the setting of the Trojan War to demonstrate the inevitability of war. Hector, Ulysses, Helen—all combine in a humorous and tragic acting-out of the struggle between Troy and Greece. A part of the main theme is that accepting the inevitability of war itself leads to the making of war. All of the intelligence and determination of those who are tired of war and cynical of its virtues are of no avail against this sense of inevitability. Hector tries as thoroughly as is humanly possible to return Helen to Greece in order to avoid war. However, there are many parties in league for war-making. For instance, the world (especially the poets and people of Troy) cannot give up the romantic vision of Paris and Helen as lovers in spite of Paris' indifference and Helen's lack of love. On consultation the priests insist that the gods require war. In fact, all of the conventions of law and custom push this useless love affair to a violent climax

between the two nations. In a very wry manner, Mr. Giradoux indicates that his own propaganda for peace must fail, too.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *A View from the Bridge*, by Arthur Miller

What is the central tragic element in this story?

Analyze Eddie and his relationship with his niece.

Rodolpho is much more than a competitor for Eddie. What does he evoke that is so attractive to many, so repellent to Eddie?

Summarize the story.

2. *Tiger at the Gates*, by Jean Giraudoux

Why is war unavoidable in this kind of situation?

Compare the ideas and feelings with those of our own time.

Is the romance of Helen and Paris too underplayed?

How does this play compare with others about the evils of war?

Additional Reading:

Madwoman of Chaillot, by Jean Giraudoux.

Arms and the Man, by George Bernard Shaw.

All My Sons, by Arthur Miller.

Oedipus Rex, by Sophocles.

PROGRAM X
BUS STOP — BAD SEED

BUS STOP is a thoroughly American comedy in language and action. (William Inge also wrote *Picnic* with a setting in the West.) This time we are entertained with a frequently boisterous courtship between an exceedingly naive cowboy and a rather hardened night club singer from Kansas City. He has already acquired a large ranch and is a first-class rancher, by his own word. She has come from the Ozarks to the big city and third-rate night clubs via a succession of "beauty" contests. Cherie, the younger singer, initially claims to have been abducted on a bus trip by Bo, the amorous cowboy. Bo is taken in hand by his older friend, Virgil, and told that he should be gentle and gallant to win the girl's affections. As the entire bus load of people is stranded temporarily in a Kansas small town bus stop, everyone has a chance to give an opinion about love. After a great deal of trouble, including a fistfight with the sheriff, Bo's outrageous antics are subdued. He finally has a serious talk with Cherie, discovering that he can give himself openly and quietly. Cherie discovers real affection for him as he reveals his gentler personality, and they decide to continue the trip to Bo's ranch and be married. Bo's only regret is that his buddy Virgil is going to leave him. With Virgil goes the rough and easy, if womanless, companionship that has made up their lives to this point.

Maxwell Anderson's BAD SEED is an extraordinarily harrowing play about a seemingly sweet little girl who commits three murders. In the unravelling the mother of this child learns that her mother, too, was a murderess: thus, the "bad seed." The chilling scenes are all the more horrifying for their familiar and reassuring middle-class atmosphere. The child, Rhoda, is the cleanest and neatest of little girls, always pretty and alert. She is wonderfully candid, except that one suspects early in the story that her very directness is more meaningful than immediately apparent. Her cold and unwavering path is obstructed at the risk of death. A small boy who wins a medal she covets is the first victim. Leroy, a janitor in the apartment house where Rhoda lives, is constantly badgering her. He is sly and malicious in a small way; he seems intuitively to guess Rhoda's thoughts and actions. When he discovers to his horror that his teasing was all too accurate, it is fatally too late for him. Rhoda's mother,

too, discovers her child's path of destruction and follows it to a bitter turn.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Bus Stop*, by William Inge

Consider the character study of Bo, his background and his "discovery" of himself and love.

What is the conflict represented by his life with Virgil?

Estimate the real contribution of the other roles to the main relationship between Cherie and Bo. How does the action of the others point up the story of the two young people?

2. *Bad Seed*, by Maxwell Anderson

Why is this story mainly "entertainment" and not an important social or problem play? Do you think that evil is hereditary? Read other sources on this topic.

For those who have seen the movie version—do you prefer this ending? Which ending better fits the author's story?

Additional Reading:

Oklahoma, by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein.

Skin of Our Teeth, by Thornton Wilder.

Strange Interlude, by Eugene O'Neill.

Winterset, by Maxwell Anderson.

PROGRAM XI

INHERIT THE WIND — THE CHERRY ORCHARD

INHERIT THE WIND, by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee, revives for us one of the most important court trials in the history of the United States, an affair that attracted two of the most outstanding personalities of the time and the attention of the world: the "monkey trial" of John Scopes. In a small town in 1925 Scopes, a school teacher, mildly suggested the validity of the evolutionary thesis stated by Darwin. Scopes was arrested, for the law then stated that such teachings were atheistic and contrary to the word of the Bible. The brilliant criminal lawyer, Clarence Darrow, came to defend Scopes; and the famed orator, William Jennings Bryan, came to prosecute. Bryan's speech-making, his reliance on a long-established political reputation as a "man of the people" all came to a sorry end against the sharper and surer reason of Darrow. The over-literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis was the focal point of their argument. Ultimately, Bryan had to "admit" that a "day" in the Biblical sense might not be a twenty-four hour day as we presently measure it. In fact, it may well only be a poetic statement of time, permitting much freedom for interpretation. Mr. Darrow, as a man of reason and extreme fairness, was a very generous and judicious victor. When Mr. Bryan literally fell into a collapse, Mr. Darrow defended Bryan's right to think and believe as he did—much to the chagrin of the cynics who were eager to pounce on the defeated silver-tongued giant.

Chekhov's THE CHERRY ORCHARD takes us back to the turn of the century, a crucial time for much of the world. In Russia as elsewhere, the industrial revolution was encroaching on the old order of the great landed estates. The Ranevskaya family, Russian aristocrats, are losing their home and lands because they cannot pay their debts, but they have little perception of their problem and no ability to change the situation. Their predicament, of course, is part of a great tide of change that is too vast to halt or turn aside. The members of the family all think of the past, particularly of their delightful cherry orchard which has figured so greatly in their lives. In one moment of reminiscence, Lyuboff Ranevskaya, the elderly owner of the estate, even thinks that she sees the distant figure of her long dead mother in the orchard. In this fashion they proceed without

hope, looking ever to the past, yet expecting a miracle to save them from eviction. Nevertheless, the auction is held; the estate is sold to a newly rich man whose father was a peasant on the estate and whose grandfather had been a slave there. As the Ranevskyaya family leaves the feudal home, a final illusion is shattered: they hear in the distance the thud of the axes chopping the cherry trees.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Inherit the Wind*, by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee

Compare the personalities of the two lawyers.

Why did Darrow and many others feel it so important that Scopes have the freedom to teach what he wanted to?

Do you find the picture of Bryan drawn too "bad" and that of Darrow, too "good"?

2. *The Cherry Orchard*, by Anton Chekhov

This play is labelled a tragedy, but Chekhov intended it as a comedy, according to some evidence. What are the elements of comedy in the story and in the various characters?

Does the impression remain of a local or a general setting?

Consider the difference in values held by Lopahin and the Ranevskayas.

Additional Reading:

The Crucible, by Arthur Miller.

Uncle Vanya, by Anton Chekhov.

PROGRAM XII

TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON—THE KABUKI DRAMA

TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON by John Patrick and Vern Sneider is one of the most widely entertaining theatrical events since World War II. It very sensitively shows how greatly two ways of life may differ but still adapt to each other. The setting is Okinawa with occupation forces of the United States trying to "democratize" the Okinawans. The main contact between the bungling and bombastic commanding officer and the natives is an Okinawan interpreter, Sakini. He is soon dispatched with a young American officer to a village where they try to remake life along American lines. Instead, the local and quieter customs take over the American officer. He is able to maintain some authority, however, and gradually develops his little community to self-sufficiency with rather unorthodox procedures, by military reasoning. Disaster appears in the form of the unimaginative Colonel Purdy, but it is amazingly averted by the villagers and Sakini, who is the real authority in many ways. These people have experienced generations of conquest by many different nations and know only too well how to persist in doing what they want to do. The Americans learn ruefully and gleefully just how this can be done. None of them will forget the peace and delight they found in the teahouse while they watched the August moon.

The theatre in Japan today consists of many constantly changing forms, but the outstanding feature is still the Kabuki drama. When on tour in this country, the Japanese troupe was received with great excitement by professionals and patrons alike. Probably the greatest single attraction of the Kabuki drama is its amazing ability to synthesize so many elements of Art. In any one production the players act, sing, and dance in the most skilled fashion imaginable. They take a traditional story and produce it in a highly stylized but organic "play," using all of their faculties of voice, choreography, and design of costume and scenery. The appeal is to the senses rather than to the intellect; any resort to the kind of very intellectual histrionics characteristic of the Western stage is minimized. The stories are not readily adapted, then, to the script form as we know it. They are highly fantastic and poetic, but very simple; the artistry is in the production. Like so many things in Japan,

attention to form and to style is paramount. In the theatre this has brought delicacy, precision, and beauty that has the admiration of the world.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

1. *Teahouse of the August Moon*, by John Patrick and Vern Sneider

Summarize the story, accounting particularly for the role of Sakini. What does Sakini have—as well as the other villagers—that makes him wise rather than simply “clever.”

Consider the great number of contrasts between Okinawan and American ways of viewing and of doing things. What do the Americans learn from the Okinawans in this respect?

What role does the teahouse play in the life of this village?

2. *The Kabuki Drama*, by Shutaro Miyake

Read all of the book, “Kabuki Drama.”

Discuss the many ways that this form of the drama differs from the others we have been reading.

Read the summaries of the eighteen best plays beginning on page 87.

Discuss the various themes, loyalties, and conflicts presented in these famous stories.

What elements of the Kabuki do you think might most benefit our type of drama?

Additional Reading:

Curious Savage, by John Patrick.

Japanese Theatre, by Faubion Bowers.

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